

# The Oliver Twins Story

Written by dreamkatcha. Any related videos, as always, can be found on my YouTube channel.

None of this would have been possible without the fantastic resources generously provided by immensely talented emulator authors, and communities such as Hall of Light, Lemon Amiga, Lemon 64, World of Spectrum, Moby Games, World of Longplays and Recorded Amiga Games. Thank you for your tireless dedication to preserving the history of gaming.

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This week I was extremely privileged to be given the opportunity to have a sneak-peak at a draft copy of the upcoming Oliver Twins 'early years' biography.

I refuse point-blank to promote anything I don't wholeheartedly believe in, so here I am giving it a well-deserved, two-thumbed plug. Spoiler: they're pointing skywards and I'm wearing a cheesy grin complete with toothy lens flare.



Chris Wilkins and his interviewees have done a tremendous job of charting the twin's whirlwind ride from schoolboy, bedroom programming entrepreneurs to self-made, multi-million copy selling business moguls.

What's heartwarming is that despite their fame and fortune, the pair, often described as two of the nicest people in the games industry, have never lost touch with their roots. On the contrary, they look back on their early years with genuine affection and humble gratitude. Perhaps this goes without saying; would this book have even got off the ground otherwise?

This unique window into the twin's Magical Kingdom highlights their successes and failures, the inspiration behind their creations, and the challenges faced and conquered along the way as the cream of British gaming rose to the top of the Gallup charts. Their scintillating fairytale-come-true should be more than sufficient to convince any aspiring developers that with dogged determination and exceptional talent, anything is possible!

What's remarkable about the Oliver Twins' meteoric rise to prominence is that they got there entirely under their own steam. They didn't have a tyrant of a dad wielding a sturdy belt like Michael Jackson, as tenuous as the parallel may be.



*No prizes for guessing which game this photo was taken to promote!*

*Their* motivation to achieve came from within, and dad, Malcolm, was initially reticent to encourage their enthusiasm

for coding in case it fizzled out as swiftly as the 'fad' arrived. He thought university would be a safer bet, but had the foresight to let his sons at least try the path less travelled first. Clearly a decent guy who only had their best interests at heart.

The twins also sacrificed their childhoods, albeit through choice, buried their heads in a Dragon 32, and later a BBC Micro B and Amstrad CPC, and didn't come up for air until they were well into their twenties. The volume of their binary output during that period is immense, and much of it had languished in the undocumented twilight zone of history prior to the brother's lid-lifting pursuit.

Unbeknownst to many fans of their progeny, Andrew and Philip produced a number of titles without credit so as to avoid upturning the Codemasters apple cart which launched their careers. At least one other game was published under a tributary pseudonym; the real name of a friend who dreamed of getting into the business at the time. All is divulged in the book.

Someone is going to find themselves extremely busy updating the Oliver Twins' Wikipedia page when it's released!

An even more momentous revelation concerns the balance of development duties within the collaboration. Referring to their 'design a game' competition entry, Gambit, Philip explains, "I designed it and Andrew typed it in". It's not remotely true, but it's a gem of an anecdote!

You'll also come to learn that Codemasters' mega-hit, Micro Machines, has its origins in a certain Oliver Twins game. A fact that they were in no great rush to acknowledge.

On a similar note, we discover how the twins' relationship with Codemasters went from strength to strength to hostility, and eventual dissolution, as Andrew and Oliver forged ahead independently having conceded one chicane too many. The straight-talking duo pull no punches in telling it like it is.

They must have been more tolerant back then - if I had to work with Colleague from Hell, Ted Carron, he wouldn't have lived long enough to contract lung cancer... assuming that's what happened to the repulsive creature!

Of course Dizzy gets his moment in the sun. In fact, he occupies the largest chunk of the book as you might expect; there were 13 titles created based on his Royal Egginess after all!

We're clued in on his origin back-story, how the name was decided upon (though that was no great mystery to begin with), the inspiration behind the Yolkfolk, and why - several years before idle animations were in vogue - he would never stay still.



The intriguing minutiae of Dizzy's evolution following player feedback throughout the late '80s and early '90s is dissected. The mistakes, the breakthroughs, the critic's reception, the 'what ifs'. It's all vividly laid bare.

Then there are the little-known Dizzy Tie-ins That Weren't. Spin-offs that Codemasters put the kibosh on because they weren't deemed sufficiently lucrative during a period when Dizzy-fatigue had begun to creep in.

Everything from his blood type to favourite pizza topping is scrutinised. Dizzy aficionados will be in seventh heaven!

Back then Codemasters teetered tenaciously on the edge of a grey area of legitimacy. They had no qualms over ruffling Nintendo's feathers, whilst simultaneously profiting from their ubiquitous platform by refusing to pay the obligatory license fees.

But before the Aladdin Deck Enhancer, which enabled the use of cheaper, unlicensed mini cartridges, the 'Codies' *poked* the hornet's nest with the Game Genie peripheral. The inordinately popular device gave rise to the unauthorised proliferation of game hacking and cheating, and landed the company up to their necks in litigation.

Did they emerge from the year-long legal battle unscathed? If you're not familiar with the saga, I won't spoil the surprise.

Worth the cover price alone is the publicity snap of the twins looking sultry and brooding, their shoulders draped with dot-matrix computer paper beside the caption, "Philip and Andrew Oliver: the software industry's answer to Bros.". Priceless!

Fellow programmers certainly won't be disappointed. Panda (that'll make sense all in good time) don't hold back where geeking out is concerned; the twins' idiosyncratic brand of coding linguistics is explored, the techniques, obstacles and workarounds elucidated.

What may otherwise seem dry and tedious to those of us who don't speak BASIC or Assembly code is presented in terms even laypeople can wrap their heads around and enjoy. Even so, any anachronisms are neatly counterbalanced by more humanist, touching or comical anecdotes. From very early in their careers, the brothers found themselves at home embracing the media spotlight, and thus are today accomplished raconteurs.

Whilst this is no frivolous, coffee table, picture book, it *is* chock full of relevant illustrations. Many of which have never been seen before beyond the immediate Oliver family. Possibly not even by them for several decades given that the book has been the most significant loft raiding escapade since Anne Frank was ousted!

You see, the brothers kept *everything*, the paraphernalia for each game secured and archived meticulously in its own folder like a retro gaming time capsule primed for future generations to exhume. Included in the book are handwritten and drawn design documents, instructions to artists and musicians, magazine advert mock-ups, maps, cheat sequences, receipts, press clippings, and photographs. Even the cutlery Dizzy used in the egg and spoon race he aced when he was just a wee ovum, probably.



For anyone who grew up on a diet of rubber keys, the Sugar daddy, Space Invaders, Pacman and the iconic beige breadbin, The Oliver Twins Story is a seductively elegiac, meandering sojourn down Simpler Times Lane by way of Bygone Era Street.

I reluctantly reached the end with a tinge of melancholy, left wondering, "What happened to me? Whatever happened to you? What became of the people we used to be?"